

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida 38, Vanderbilt 14

BILLY NAPIER: I'll tell you what, Gator Nation keeps showing up. We're very thankful. We talked to the players Friday about the importance of homecoming. Obviously it's independent of the competitive part of the game, the execution of the game, but one day they're going to be coming back, and they're going to be sitting in that stadium watching the team, and they're going to want to be proud of how the team plays, the brand of football that they play.

Think about that, who we represent. I think University of Florida is a special place because of the significant impact it's had on a lot of people along the way. It's good to win on homecoming. It's good to play a little bit better brand of football.

I do think there's things that we need to clean up. I think we had a few too many penalties today. We tackled better. Really gave up one play in the first half, and overall got to play some players there at the end.

This game requires mental toughness, certainly playing in the SEC.

I do think that every week is a new week, and sometimes you don't play the way you want to play. You've got to get up off the mat, you've got to go back in the ring as a competitor.

We really wanted to play smart today, wanted to play tough, fundamentally sound, and we wanted to play with better energy, and I think we got that accomplished.

Out of respect for the game and out of respect for the work that this group has done, I think they played a little more like we want them to today.

What questions do we have?

Q. Concern about some of the injuries coming, particularly on the offensive side of the ball with the offensive line and Trevor, and what does it say you

were able to achieve the balance today? Seemed like you were able to throw and run the ball pretty well and pretty evenly.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I'm proud of the players that had to play, in particular the two tackles, Lyndell, Kam Waites, both of which had an opportunity to play. Treyaun Webb did some good things today. It's good to have Trey back. He's a difference maker. Certainly to see Kahleil, Andy, those guys get an opportunity, and really you think about Arlis Boardingham really showed the growth that we've been seeing. That guy is a very capable -- he's a mismatch type player. Made some really unique plays today.

A lot of good. We challenged them, and I think they answered that challenge.

Q. Getting up off the mat is not always a given, but how do you like how they responded given how tough last week was and how much better was that locker room this week?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I continue to tell you guys that I think this group has some character about them. I don't see -- I see some maturity. I think there's some awareness. I think they've got a pretty good understanding of why they want. I think they have a pretty good understanding of why they lose, what contributes to that. They're able to stay pretty steady.

To be quite honest, I think they were embarrassed a little bit. I think there was an element to that that they wanted to get back in there and play again and make a statement that that's not who they are.

Look, I think the staff felt the same way.

Today there was a lot of good out there. I think we've got to keep things in perspective. We've got to understand that bigger challenges are ahead, and we've got to really -- one of the big challenges for our team is to go play well on the road. I think that's what's next for us, and next week will present that challenge for us.

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Q. Montrell, just his performance, looked a lot like last season today?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think Montrell, in his career, I think he went over 2,000 yards today if I'm not mistaken. Early he was good. He was really good. The one touchdown, he just makes a guy miss and walks in there.

He played big today. He's a 217-, 18-pound back, but I thought he played with an edge today. He was tough to tackle.

We blocked them pretty good today. We got the ball to the second level. I thought we had good man answers today, and we managed the pressure with the perimeter throws.

It was well executed. Montrell was at the center of that for sure.

Q. Sometimes when you see the beaten Graham take some certain plays, what does it say about his toughness?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think -- yeah, I want him to get rid of the ball sometimes, you know. But I think when we look at it, some of the things that happened today, he's holding it a little bit too long probably. We want to blame others, but I think he's going to look at it and say, man, I've got to get through this thing and get it out.

We took a sack on like 2nd and 1 today. I'm about to break my headset.

I think he holds -- he's really critical of himself. He wants to do everything exactly the right way.

Very coachable, a pleasure to coach, and I do think he's a competitor. I think he showed some toughness. I think the players respect that.

For the most part, Kahleil Jackson was the only guy that threw an interception today, so he's going to get it for that, too. Can't get more open than that.

Q. You mentioned Kam Waites' return to the field. Can you speak about that journey, what you've observed there, and what it meant to you to see someone so committed?

BILLY NAPIER: You know, Kam, I think he'll be a chapter in the book one day. You realize this guy did not play football in high school. This guy was a -- we're over there watching LSU's camp. This guy's brother is in the camp. He's there. He's not even participating in the camp. We meet him. He's going to Kilgore Junior College to try

football. He's a big-time AAU basketball. Jabbar meets him and says, hey, my coach would like you. You need to come over here, an hour up the road. That's back when you could do the private workouts.

We took a flier on him, and he's going to turn into a really good player for us, I think. 6'8", 355. It's one thing to have an achilles. It's another thing to be that big and come back from it.

Look, he's changed his body. He's leaner. He's more explosive. Although he's been injured, I think it speaks to the training room, Tyler Miles and return-to-play protocol in sports science does a great job, and then certainly working with a nutritionist and strength and conditioning, that plan has worked for him for sure.

Q. You mentioned a second ago the importance of translating this to play well on the road. What needs to happen? Is it a matter of not getting too high after a win? What do you need to see from this team to translate momentum into road games?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, that's a good question. I think we've spent some time on it.

I think it's a challenge to play on the road in this league. I think you see right now in college football, I don't know what the records are, but I think the home team has a pretty significant advantage, right, in particular in our league where everywhere you go is pretty rowdy.

I think one of the things that's important is that you start fast. You've got to show that you're in the mix, that you're ready to go, and ultimately you've got to solve the operating in that environment, right, the communication element, and then ultimately it comes down to execution.

I think we know when we play bad, we know why.

We've got work to do. Definitely going to be working on all those things this week.

Q. You touched on Boardingham a few minutes ago. Can you elaborate on his growth? What's he done to enable himself to have a game like he had tonight?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, last year we were really high on him, and he got hurt. You remember he had the shoulder, had to go through that entire process to get back. He's a kid who hasn't played tight end, so he's a receiver, linebacker. He's a track athlete.

So all the things that we're asking him to do are completely new. I mean, this guy hasn't played in the C area, he

hasn't played in the wing. There's a ton to learn in there. He's a smart kid, but it's almost like playing quarterback to some degree. There's a mental part that I can't tell you -- it's challenging. You can't overlook that.

Then there's a set of fundamentals you have to learn at tight end. It's not like he had any background in that before he showed up, so it was all new. So mentally learning the system and fundamentally the physical component, all of that was new. It's turned out to be a good evaluation.

I think he was one of the guys. We hit the ground -- our personnel guys, we're combing the entire country in terms of players that are left over that are available. He was one of those.

Look, we took a chance on the guy and brought him in. Phenomenal family. Just really good people.

It's turned out well. I'm hopeful we'll get more of that out of him in the future.

Q. What happened on the long touchdown play with Jason and how do you feel like the defense responded after that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, you know, they're telling me, I don't know, I haven't seen the TV copy, but they're telling me that his facemask got grabbed and they yanked him down and he lost his balance. But I don't know. I've got a hard job, and those officials have got a hard job, too.

I do think really it's the only play we gave up in the first half. The big deal was Ja'Keem Jackson. That was a huge play in the game relative to momentum. He gives up the play, and then we were able to stop them, and then he makes the play. I thought that was one of the more pivotal sequences of events in the first half.

Q. 0 for 3 on 4th down; how critical was that in this game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, conversion downs are -- those are turnovers, right. We count them as takeaways. We count them as turnovers. When we talk about turnover margin, we include turnovers on downs. That's a critical piece of the puzzle for sure.

Q. Billy, would you talk about how Trey Wilson, what he adds, how that opened the offense up.

BILLY NAPIER: You know, Trey is tough to tackle. He's got unique acceleration, showed some toughness today, I thought.

He's got some play strength to him, although he's a little bit smaller guy. But we were trying to get him the ball as much as possible.

He's one of the players that you want to make sure has an opportunity. We tried a few things that didn't quite work today with him, but I think for the most part, we want to make sure when the game is over every week that he had his opportunity to impact the game.

Q. Did you see what you were looking for from start to finish of the week in getting ready for this game after that game last week?

BILLY NAPIER: I thought that we -- I'm going to tell you, man, early in the week, it's a challenge. It's a challenge for the staff. It's a challenge for the team. It's a challenge for me because you're disappointed.

But I do think we'll benefit from going through that. I think that's the important thing here. There's going to be -- growth comes with struggle, and I think we've got to keep that edge. We've got to remember what we felt like. That's got to be fuel for the fire for the future.

We practice on Sunday night, and then they have about -- they have a day off. We show up Tuesday.

I think by then, we had evaluated what happened. We were comfortable with why. We were trying to still figure out some of the details.

But I do think they showed up Tuesday and Wednesday were good work days. I felt like we finished -- we tweaked the format of practice just a little bit, and I think it helped us.

Then we just had a little bit different focus and energy, I thought, Thursday and Friday. Again, I think it goes back to Mark's question about a little bit embarrassed. This place, it'll get to you if you don't watch out.

They're young people, so I think it's healthy, because look, you guys know like I do, this game -- I told them Friday, look, your life is as simple as it's going to be right now, just so you know. More complicated days are coming. More responsibility is coming. It's important that we learn from some of the things that this game can teach us.

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